

THOUGHTS ON
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

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DOUBTS in religious matters, far from being blameable—far from being acts of impiety, ought to be regarded as praiseworthy, when they proceed from a man who humbly acknowledges his ignorance, and arise from the fear of offending God by the abuse of reason.

To admit any conformity between the reason of man, and the eternal reason of God, and to pretend that God demands the sacrifice of human reason, is to maintain that God wills one thing, and intends another thing at the same time.

When God, of whom I hold my reason, demands of me to sacrifice it, he becomes a mere juggler that snatches from me what he pretended to give.

If I renounce my reason, I have no longer a guide—I must then blindly adopt a *secondary principle*, and the matter in question becomes a supposition.

If *reason* be a gift of Heaven, and we can say as much of *faith*, Heaven has certainly made us two presents not only incompatible, but in direct contradiction to each other. In order to solve the difficulty, we are compelled to say either that *faith* is a chimera, or that reason is useless.

Pascal, Nicole and others have said, that God will punish with eternal torments the faults of a guilty father upon all his innocent offspring; and that this is a proposition *superior* to reason, and not in *contradiction* to it; but what shall we propose as being contradictory to reason if such blasphemy as this is not so?

Bewildered in an immense forest during the night, and having only one small torch for my guide, a stranger approaches and thus addresses me:—"Friend, blow out thy light, if thou wouldst make sure of the right path." This stranger was a priest.

If my reason be the gift of Heaven, it is the voice of Heaven that speaks; shall I hearken to it?

Neither merit nor demerit is applicable to the judgment of our rational faculties, for all the submission and good-will imaginable could not assist the blind man in the perception of colours.

I am compelled to perceive evidence where it is, or the want of evidence where it is not, so

long as I retain my senses; and if my judgment fail me, it becomes a *misfortune*, not a *sin*.

The Author of Nature would not reward me for having been a *wit*, surely, then, he will not *damn* me for having been a *fool*. Nay, more; he will not *damn* me even for being wicked. Is not my own conscience a sufficient punishment for me?

Every virtuous action is accompanied with an inward satisfaction; every criminal action with chagrin and remorse. The mind acknowledges without shame its repugnance to such, or such propositions, although there is neither virtue nor vice in the belief or disbelief of them.

If grace be necessary to belief, let us wait till that grace be sent us from above.

God surely will not punish us for the want of that which it has not pleased him to bestow upon us. You tell me to ask this grace in prayer, but is not grace necessary to assist me in asking for *faith*, the want of which I cannot discover by the light of reason?

The true religion, interesting the whole human race at all times and in all situations, ought to be eternal, universal, and self-evident; whereas the religions pretended to be revealed having none of these characteristics, are consequently demonstrated to be false.

The miracles, of which only a few men are said to have been witnesses, are insufficient to prove the truth of a religion that ought to be believed by the whole world.

'The pretended facts with which all revealed religion is supported are *ancient* and *wonderful*; that is to say, the most suspicious evidence possible, to prove things the most incredible; for to prove the truth of the Gospel by a miracle, is to prove an absurdity by a contradiction in nature.

Is it quite certain that the God of the Christians is the true God? It appears that the Devil is a much more powerful Being, seeing that the number of the damned is so much greater than that of the elect.

The Son of God died purposely to vanquish the Devil. In order to gain his point he was reduced to the necessity of dying, and yet the Devil has ever since had the ascendancy. How then are we benefitted by the death of the Son of God?

The God of the Chistians, for an apple, punished all the human race and killed his own son. This only proves that God is a father who makes a great deal to do about his apples, and cares very little for his children.

A God that killed God to appease God, was an expressive phrase of La Hontan, a phrase of itself sufficient to destroy the Christian religion, a phrase

that will still retain its absurdity; should one hundred folio volumes be written to prove it rational.

But what will God do to those who never heard of the death of his Son? or who, having heard of him, still remained unbelievers? Will he punish the deaf for not hearing? Will he torment the weak-headed for not understanding an inconceivable absurdity?

Why are the miracles of Jesus Christ true, and those of Esculapius, Pythagoras, and Apollonius, false?

All the Jews at Jerusalem who saw the great miracles of Jesus, were doubtless converted? By no means.—So far from having any belief in him, they put him to death. These Jews (whom a God himself came to convert) must have been a very stiff-necked race.—We have in every country seen the people drawn aside and deceived by a single false miracle, and yet all the true miracles of Jesus made very little impression on the minds of the Jews. The miracle of their incredulity is no doubt wonderful; however, our priests reply, that this obstinacy of the Jews had been predicted as a chastisement from Heaven. In that case why did God work so many miracles when the futility of them had been foreseen?

It is morally certain that Cæsar existed. The existence of Jesus is as certain as the existence of

Cæsar;—it is thence inferred that the resurrection of Jesus is also certain, but the conclusion is false; the existence of Cæsar was not miraculous, wherefore should the existence of Jesus be thought so?

The religion of Jesus, announced by ignorant fanatics (who were either easily deceived or easily deceived others) made the first Christians; the same religion now preached by learned men continues to make unbelievers.

You tell me that these ignorant Apostles suffered death to prove the truth of what they preached to mankind; instead of which they proved only their own enthusiasm, or the chastisement of the people on whom they practised their hypocrisy. To suffer martyrdom in any cause proves nothing, except that our party is not the most powerful.

How did it happen that God permitted to be put to death those men that he sent purposely to convert the world? Would it not have been more in conformity with the divine attributes to change the hearts of the people?

As for the martyrs who suffered after the time of the Apostles, they were not witnesses of the miracles of Jesus; they died to maintain that those who had instructed them in the Christian religion, had neither deceived themselves nor wished to deceive others.

We attest what we have ourselves seen, or what we believe we have seen. When we attest what others have seen, we prove nothing, except that we are willing to believe them on their words. The whole fabric of Christianity is built on the authority of those who had formerly an interest in establishing it, and who now have an interest in maintaining it.

It is pretended, that submission to legislative authority forbids all examination and reasoning; but do not the interested Priests of all the religions on earth pretend to possess this authority? Does it not equally belong to the Bramins, the Talapoins, the Bonzes, the Molochs, as well as to the Ministers of Christianity?

It is the education of youth which makes a Christian believe in Christ, a Turk in Mahomet, and an Indian in the incarnations of the Vestnou. It is the education of youth which makes the Siamese believe the wonders that are told him about Sommonocodom.

Faith, in every country, is only a blind deference to the sentiments of the priests, who are always infallible where they are sufficiently powerful.

Our priests are unceasingly talking to us of the weakness and errors of the human mind; but is the mind of a priest more infallible than mine?

Is his understanding less subject to error than that of an unbeliever? May not his passions and interests deceive him in the same way that others are deceived?

We no sooner refuse to believe on the bare word of a priest, than he endeavours to frighten us; but the terror he excites in us is not a convincing argument, neither can fear be a motive of credibility. *Believe, or you will be damned.* This is the strongest argument in Theology.

But is it certain that I shall be damned for not believing what appeared to me incredible? Divines have long been asked to reconcile the dogma of eternal punishment with that of infinite mercy; but this they will not meddle with; yet still they persist in representing our heavenly Father as a tyrant, to whom no father of a family would wish to have any resemblance.

Why would you punish a guilty wretch when no utility can arise from his punishment? What good results to mankind, or to the Deity himself, from the punishment of the millions of unfortunate beings who have already been damned?

The dogma of eternal punishment is the offspring of folly, of atrocity, and of blasphemy. If God will punish eternally, what proportion exists between the offence and the chastisement? If he punish for his own satisfaction, he becomes a

monster of barbarity; if he punish to correct others, his rigour is useless for those who are not witnesses of it.

But further:—Why is this God so wrathful? Can man, either living or dead, tarnish his glory and disturb his repose and felicity? If God be offended at sin, it is because he *wills* to be offended. If God will eternally punish sin, it is because he wills that sin shall eternally be committed.

It is pretended that God will burn the wicked man (who can do nothing against him) in a fire that shall endure for ever; yet should we not regard as culpable any father who should plan the easiest death imaginable for his son, though that son had compromised his honour, his fortune, or even his life?

God the Father judges mankind deserving of his eternal vengeance; God the Son judges them worthy of his infinite mercy; the Holy Ghost remains neutral. How can we reconcile this verbiage with the unity of the will of God?

All the evils that could possibly be committed would only merit an infinite punishment; yet, in order that we may always be terrified at the idea of Deity, the priests have made *man* sufficiently powerful to offend the Author of Nature to all eternity.

All the evil which man is capable of committing is not all the evil that possibly might be committed. How can a finite being, a worm of earth, offend the infinite being who created him, or disturb the powers which regulate the universe?

I should, without hesitation, believe any respectable individual who might bring me the intelligence of an army having obtained a victory over its opponent, &c.; but should the whole population of Paris assure me that a dead man rose from his grave, I would not believe a word of it. When we find that an historian has imposed upon us, or that a whole nation has been deceived, we must not take these for prodigies.

A single demonstration is more convincing than fifty unconnected facts. Pontiff of Mahomet!—cause the lame man to walk, the dumb to speak, the blind to see, or the dead to rise from their graves, and to thy great astonishment my faith shall not be shaken. Wouldst thou have me to become thy proselyte—lay aside these pranks and let us reason together. I have more dependance on my judgment than I have on my eyes.

How canst thou believe that God requires to be worshipped? Weak mortal! What need has the Deity of thy homage? Dost thou think that thou canst add any thing to his happiness or to his glory? Thou mayest honour thyself by rais-

ing thy thoughts to the Great Author of thy being, but thou canst do nothing for him, he is too much above thy insignificance. Always bear in mind, that if any kind of worship be more acceptable to him than the rest, it must be that which proceeds from an honest heart. What matter then in what manner thou expressest thy sentiments? Does he not read them in thy mind? What matters it in what garments, in what attitude, in what language thou addressest him in prayer? Is he like those kings of the earth who reject the petitions of their subjects, because they have been ignorant of, or disregarded some little formality? Pull not down the Almighty to thy own littleness, but believe that if one worship were more agreeable to him than another, he would have made it known to the whole world. Believe that he receives with the same goodness the wishes of the Mussulman, the Catholic, and the Indian; that he hears with the same kindness the prayers of the savage, who addresses him from the midst of a forest, as those of a Pontiff, who wears the tiara.

Nothing could be better adapted to overthrow morality and destroy it altogether, than to couple it with religion; neither could any thing be more pernicious than to make men believe that they offended God when they injured themselves or their fellow-creatures; and hence arose the ne-

cessity of obtaining God's favour, without any regard to the duties they owe to their brethren.

Reason tells us that when we commit crimes, it is men, and not God, that we injure; and common sense tells us that we injure ourselves when we give way to disorderly passions. The Christian religion teaches us to imitate a God that is cruel, insidious, jealous, and implacable in his wrath. Christians! with such a model before you, what will be your morality? Can the God of Moses, of Joshua, and of David, be the God of an honest man?

A religion is dangerous when it confounds our ideas of morality; a religion is false when it destroys the perfections of the Deity; a religion is detestable when it substitutes for its worship a vindictive dæmon instead of a beneficent God.

Christians! in obeying your gospels to the letter, you will be neither citizens, husbands, fathers, friends, nor faithful subjects. You will be pilgrims on earth—strangers in your own country—fierce enemies to yourselves—and your brethren, and your groans even will not leave you the hope of ever being happy.

FINIS.